

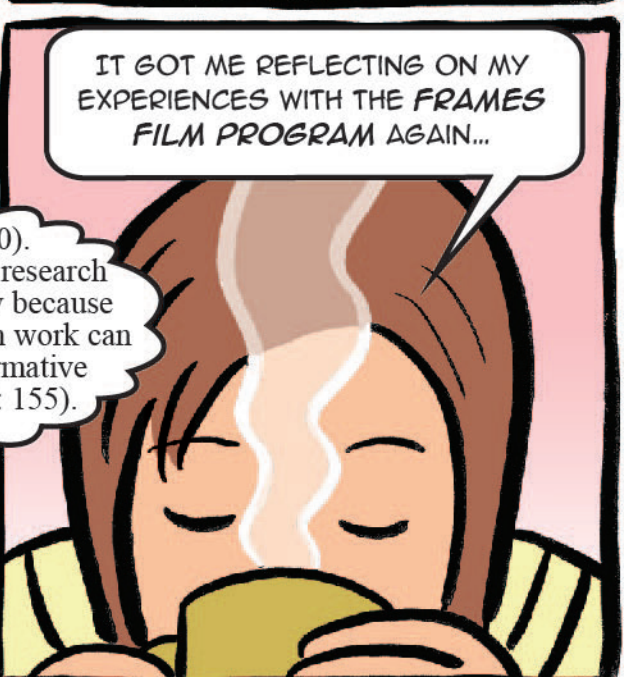
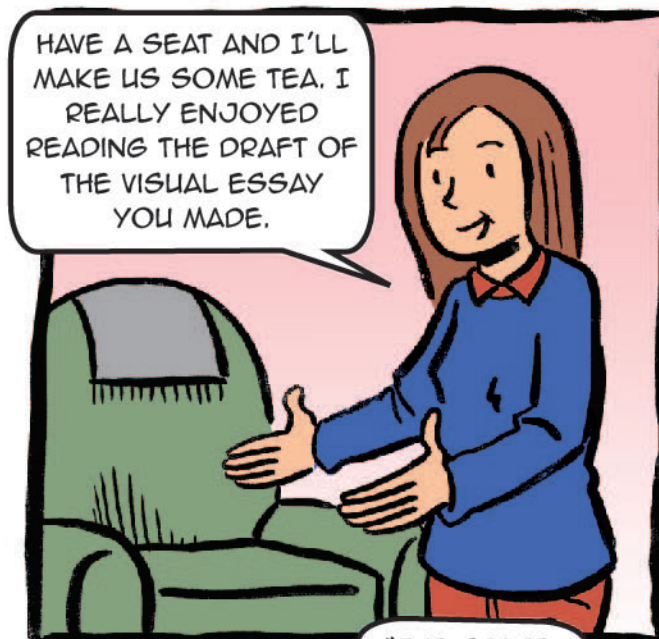
**Relational Connections through the Space of Learning:
Exploring Youths' Experiences of Filmmaking with Comics**

Abstract

Youth filmmaking is considered as a relational practice through analysis of a case study that took place in an informal learning setting. Comics as a research form allows us to investigate and portray Sally's story through a biographical-style sequential narrative case study as we visualize her experience through various encounters with the space of learning. We identify characteristics of informal learning spaces that encourage youth to create meanings from filmmaking as media arts practice. This visual essay provides a contextual and unique outlook into Sally's struggle and joy of learning, thus allowing teachers and educators to ponder the role of relationality in youth arts engagement.

Relational spaces, collaboration, comics, art education, filmmaking.

Relational Connections through the Space of Learning: Exploring Youths' Experiences of Filmmaking with Comics



(Ellsworth 2005: 80).
Comics are employed as research output in this visual essay because "comic book arts education work can contribute to... transformative meanings" (Karr 2013: 155).

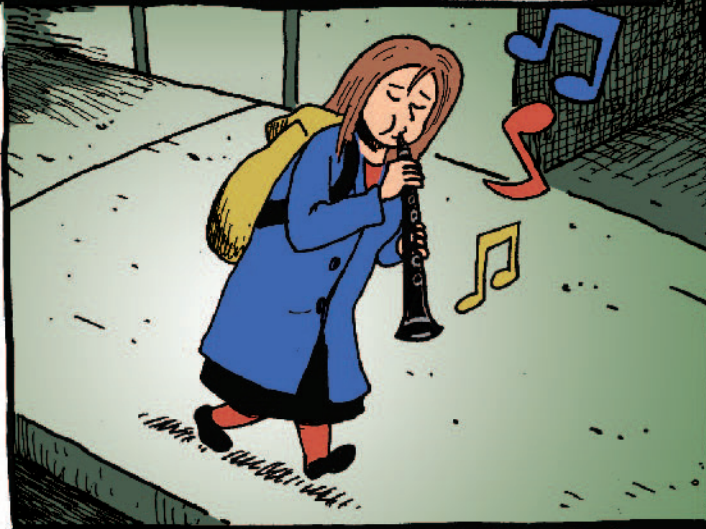
I MOVED TO VANCOUVER 3
YEARS AGO...

-- I WAS 21 AND HOMELESS...

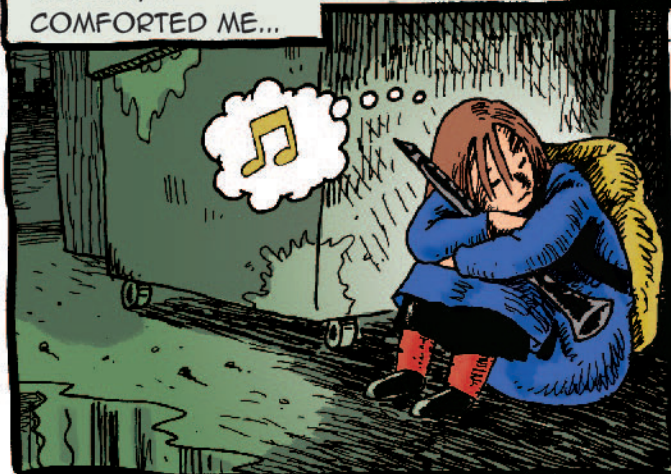
-- TRYING TO SURVIVE IN ONE
OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE
CITIES IN THE WORLD.

ALL I HAD WAS A BACKPACK, SOME
CLOTHES, MY JOURNAL AND MY CLARINET.

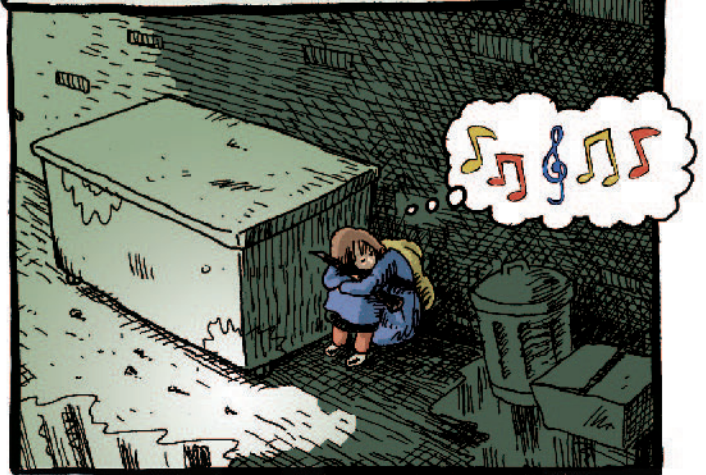
MY CLARINET IS MY MOST PRIZED
POSSESSION... AND AT THAT TIME IT WAS
PRACTICALLY MY ONLY POSSESSION.



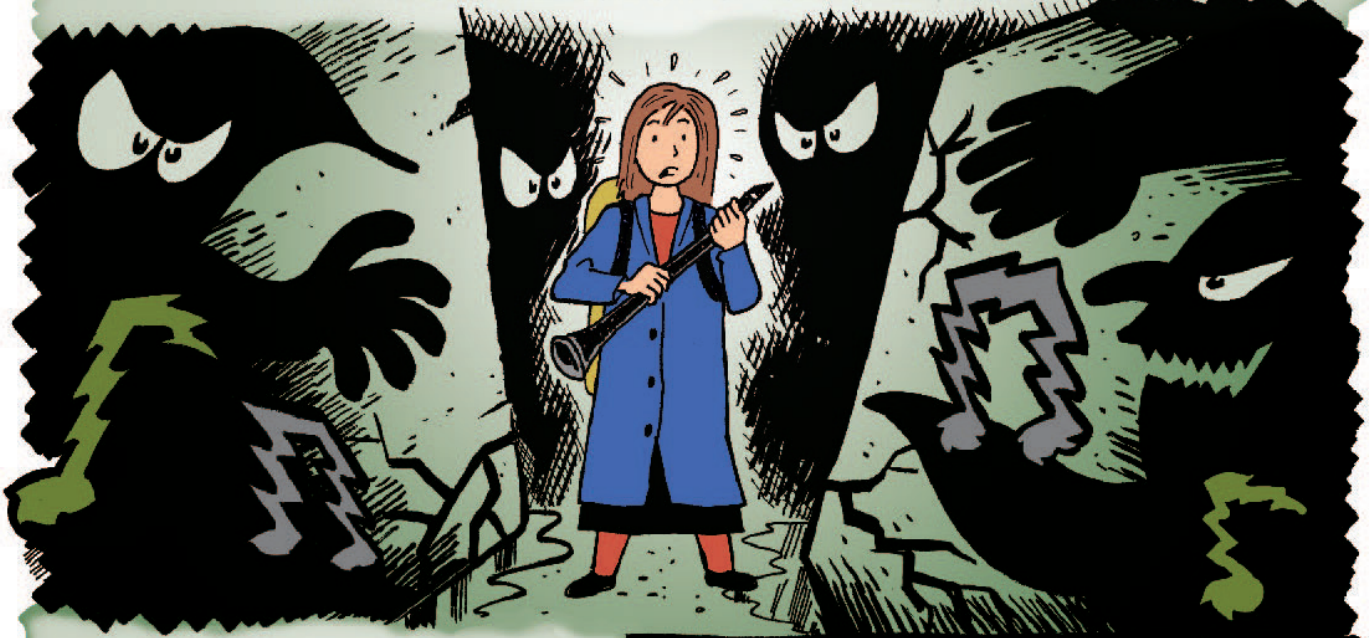
I SLEPT ON THE STREETS, HUGGING MY
CLARINET... I WAS PROTECTING IT AND, IN
RETURN, IT
COMFORTED ME...



-- IN A WORLD WHERE COMFORT AND
PROTECTION ARE HARD TO FIND.

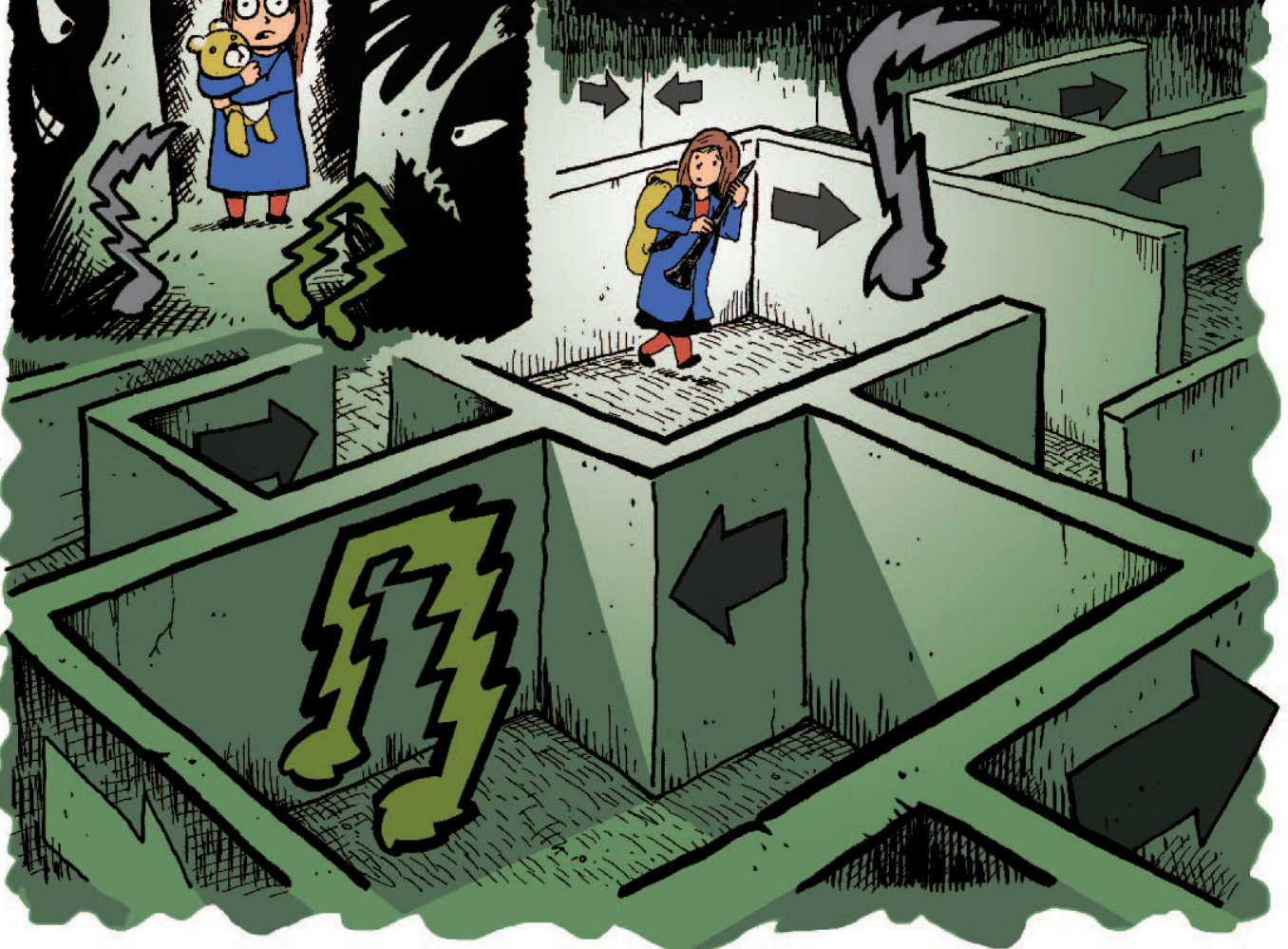
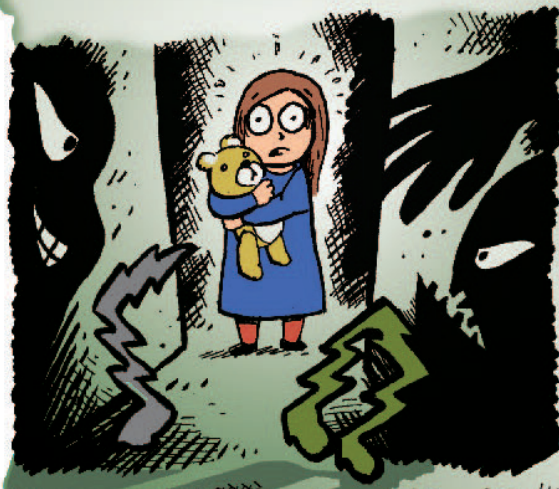


I WAS GOING THROUGH A COMBINATION OF ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND PTSD. A DOCTOR TOLD ME I HAD A PERSONALITY DISORDER AND PUT ME ON A COCKTAIL OF MEDICATIONS THAT MADE ME HIGH AND OUT OF FOCUS ALL THE TIME.



I'VE BEEN DEALING WITH THIS STUFF MY WHOLE LIFE...

I WAS **LOST** AND **CONFUSED** IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM. I ASKED MY DOCTOR TO REFER ME TO A PSYCHIATRIST TO GET ADJUSTMENTS TO MY MEDICATION. THE ANSWER WAS **NO!**



I WAS ASKING FOR HELP BUT **NO ONE** WOULD HELP ME. I JUST KEPT GOING THROUGH THE SAME THING AND **NOTHING** WAS CHANGING!



I HAD TO HELP MYSELF. EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO, I DECIDED TO GO OFF ALL MY MEDICATIONS. I ALSO QUIT SMOKING.

I NEEDED TO **FOCUS** ON MYSELF AGAIN!

JOB FAIRS PROGRAMS FRAMES WORKSHOPS



I GOT INTO A YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM AND RECEIVED EMAILS ABOUT WORKSHOPS, JOB FAIRS AND YOUTH PROGRAMS. THAT'S HOW I HEARD ABOUT FRAMES. I AM MORE INTO MUSIC THAN FILM BUT I WANTED TO GIVE IT A SHOT TO MAKE NEW CONNECTIONS.

FRAMES OPERATES OUT OF EAST VANCOUVER'S DRIVE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (D-YES). MULTI-BARRIERED YOUTH AGED 16-30 RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM:



A FULL CASE MANAGEMENT TEAM,



A SOCIAL WORKER,



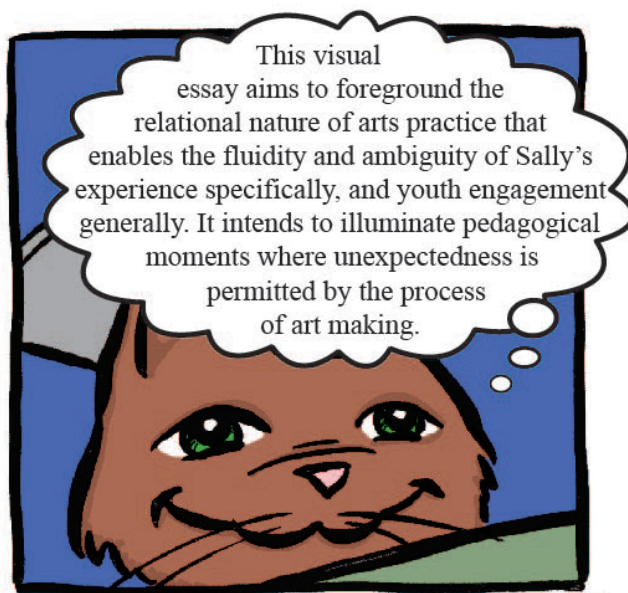
A FILM INSTRUCTOR.

A GROUP OF TEN YOUTHS COLLABORATIVELY CREATED SHORT FILMS EXPRESSING THEIR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES OR COMMUNITY CONCERNS, AND DEVELOPED TECHNIQUES OF PROFESSIONAL FILMMAKING OVER THE COURSE OF TEN WEEKS.



The arts have transformative powers over individuals and communities, beyond being a cost-benefit means of youth employment; or therapeutic medium for health improvement under programs governed by adult-driven standardized assessments. These portrayals underestimate the complexity of the arts' relation to human experience.

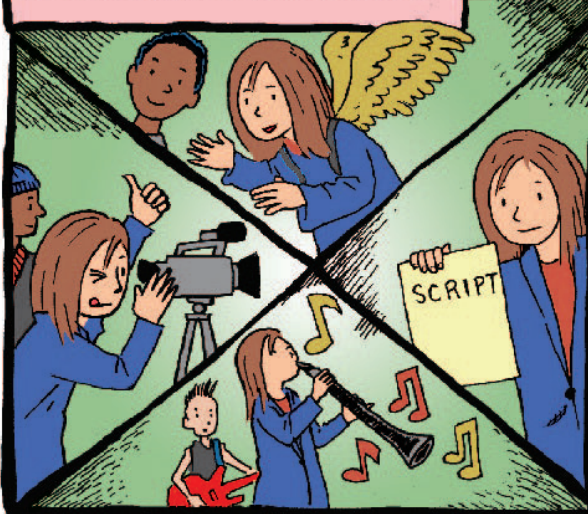




MY FIRST TIME AT FRAMES I KEPT ASKING MYSELF: "WHO ARE ALL THESE PEOPLE? WHAT IF THEY DON'T LIKE ME? I'M SCARED!"



IN THE BEGINNING, I WAS JUST SHOWING UP TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE.



AS THE WEEKS PROGRESSED, I WAS CONTRIBUTING MORE TO PROJECTS... AND I'VE MET A LOT OF TALENTED PEOPLE. I ALREADY HAVE FOUR FRIENDS WHO GIVE ME INSPIRATION AND HOPE TO KEEP WRITING MUSIC.





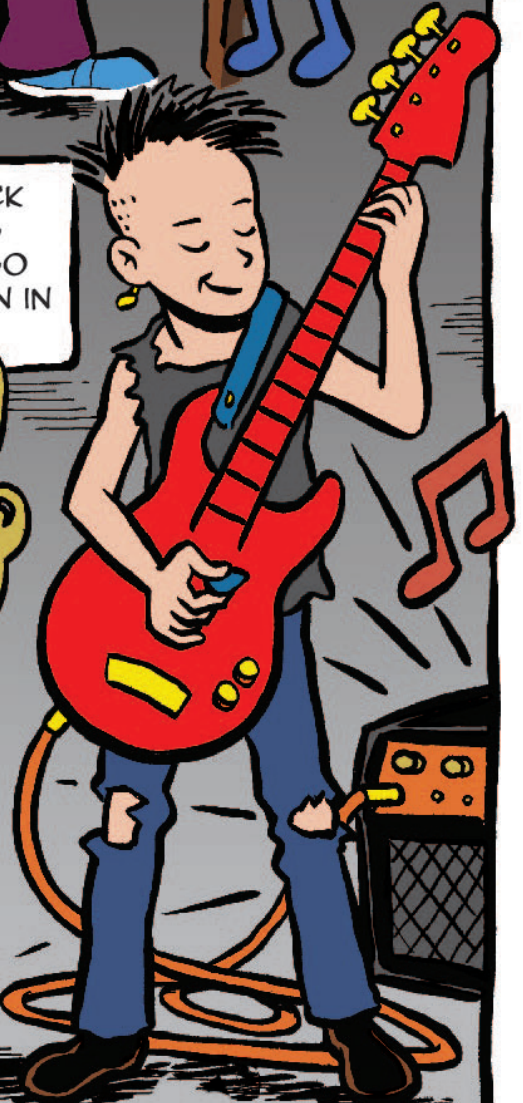
CHRIS IS AN EXCELLENT SONGWRITER. HE IS A MUSICAL MENTOR FOR INDIGENOUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS. HE ALREADY MADE THE SOUNDTRACKS FOR THREE FRAMES FILMS.



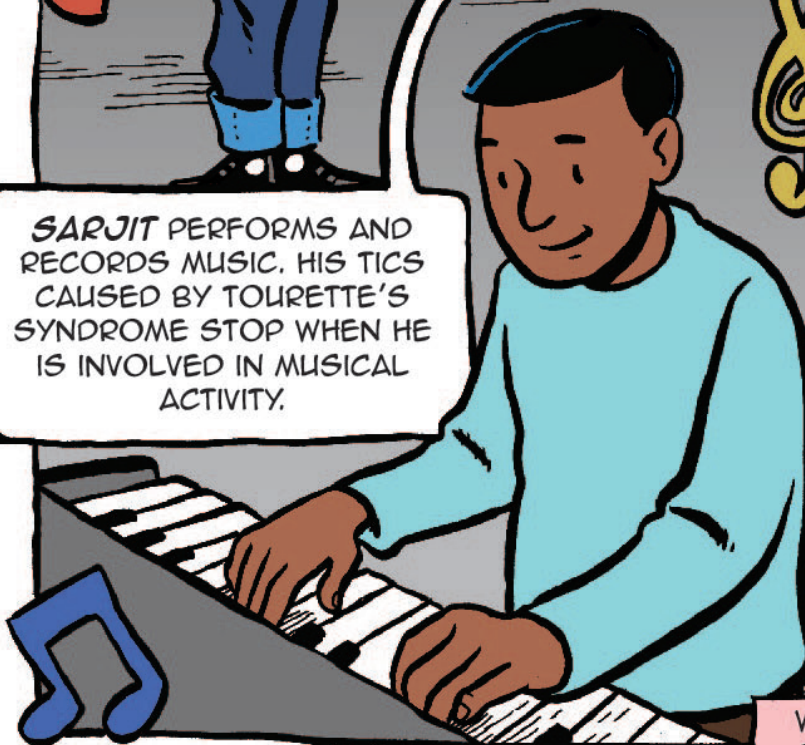
SHANNON PLAYS MUSIC ALL THE TIME AND ALSO SINGS IN A CHOIR. SHANNON COLLABORATED WITH CHRIS ON THE SOUNDTRACKS.



IDA PLAYS IN A FEW ROCK BANDS AND COMPOSES THEATRE MUSIC. SHE ALSO VOLUNTEERS FOR CHILDREN IN SPEECH THERAPY.



SARJIT PERFORMS AND RECORDS MUSIC. HIS TICS CAUSED BY TOURETTE'S SYNDROME STOP WHEN HE IS INVOLVED IN MUSICAL ACTIVITY.

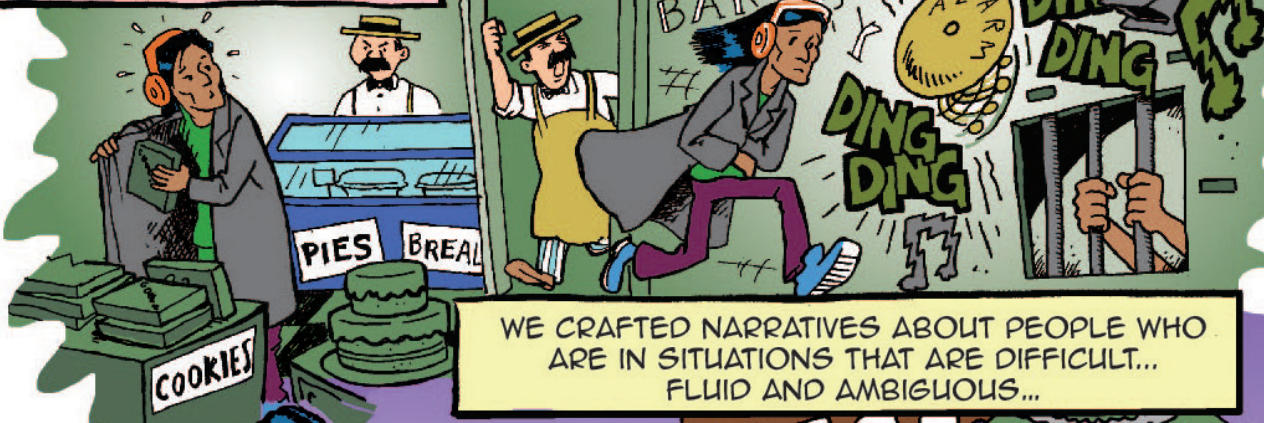


WE ALL BROUGHT OUR RESPECTIVE STRENGTHS TO THE TABLE.

OUR SHORT FILM THEME WAS **CRIME PREVENTION**. WE WANTED TO LOOK AT ROOT CAUSES OF CRIME DIFFERENTLY. SO MANY TIMES WHAT IS LABELED AS CRIME IS A RESPONSE TO A VARIETY OF PRESSURES IN LIFE. DEALING WITH THE **CONSEQUENCES** ONLY MAY LEAD TO **OVERLOOKING** THE REAL PERSON IN THAT SITUATION.



IN ONE OF OUR FILMS WE PORTRAYED A HOMELESS YOUTH SHOPLIFTING A BOX OF COOKIES TO SHARE WITH HIS FRIENDS FOR CHRISTMAS.



WE CRAFTED NARRATIVES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE IN SITUATIONS THAT ARE DIFFICULT... FLUID AND AMBIGUOUS...



I WAS ONE OF THEM. WE ALL WERE... WE ALL ARE...

INITIALLY I FELT *DISCONNECTED* IN THOSE FIRST FEW WEEKS OF THE PROGRAM, AS WE AWKWARDLY GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND OUR STORIES.

By writing, performing, filming, and editing narratives of collective authorship, Sally discovered her own productivity in ambiguity.

NOW I *LOVE* IT AND I STILL GO TO FRAMES MEETINGS TO VOLUNTEER AS A PEER MENTOR, AND BECAUSE I FEEL *CONNECTED* TO OTHER PEOPLE....

OVER THE LAST YEAR, I'VE DISCOVERED WAYS OF SPREADING THESE FEELINGS AS RELATIONAL PRACTICE INTO THE WIDER VANCOUVER COMMUNITY ...

-- I'M WORKING AS A CARE WORKER WITH A COMMUNITY LIVING SOCIETY NOW.



"Film-making is an intense relationship between a myriad of human and non-human actions – lights, cameras, editing machines, actors, editors, film-makers and directors, to identify just a few in this complex assemblage" (Barrett & Bolt 2013: 5).

Filmmaking invited Sally to enter into an inquiry that demands collective endeavor in social exploration and experimentation.

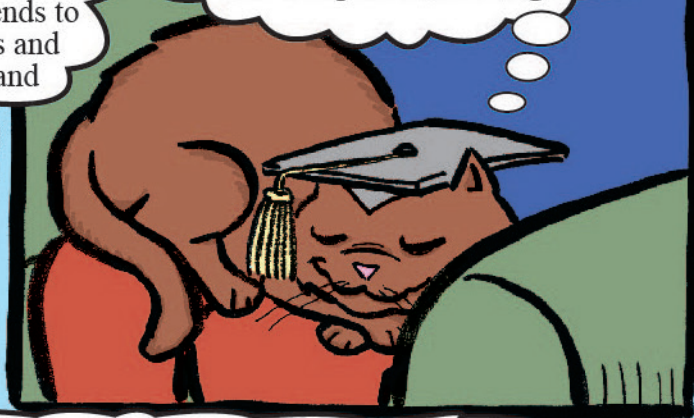
Such an inquiry led her to liminal spaces of the unknown in which the sometimes chaotic uncertainty of filmmaking reflected the hardship in her life at the time. Sally's experience moves away from art's potential of representation to form transverse connections that enable nodes of entanglement in the community.

WE LEARN THINGS THE BEST BY GOING THROUGH WITH DIFFERENT LIFE EXPERIENCES. FILMMAKING HELPED ME COME OUT OF MY SHELL.



Art teachers and educators create conditions that allow learners to feel safe and to trust their own decision-making. Filmmaking becomes an "artful form of relationality" (Davies & Grannon 2009: 1) and opens to a form of arts learning that attends to the dynamics of social relations and connectedness to difference and reciprocity.

Thinking relationally in community art education points to a recognition of the affective, intuitional, spatial and embodied dimensions of pedagogical moments as ways of learning. Sally's story is not about whether she can get a job or become empowered after learning filmmaking techniques; it's about her journey of being vulnerable in a search for relationships with herself, others and the space of learning.



We gratefully appreciate the financial support of this research from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). And a big thank you to Frames' staff and participants for making this visual essay possible.



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